



RESEARCH IMPACT SUMMARY

December 15, 2021

The Rise and Fall of Fakery: Scrutinizing Charismatic Christianity in Ghana

How social media users are using the visual arts to debunk outlandish claims by some Ghanaian Christian religious leaders

Several charismatic Christian religious leaders in Ghana gain wealth and followers by claiming to possess supernatural powers, such as the ability to shapeshift or prophesize death. But increasingly, their claims are being called out on social media as ‘fake’. Who is behind the accusations? What approach are they taking? And what has sparked this growing movement?

In late 2020, soon after the death of Jerry John Rawlings, a former president of Ghana, a meme surfaced on social media that featured controversial charismatic Pentecostal Christian religious leader Daniel Owusu Bempah, also known as ‘The Nation’s Prophet’. The meme artist claimed that God had given Bempah knowledge of the former president’s demise before the fact, but he had been unable to reveal this information to anyone because he was focused on prophesizing the outcome of the 2020 US elections. The meme mocks Bempah’s claims of having prophesizing abilities, and Bempah is only one among several Christian religious leaders in Ghana who make such claims of possessing supernatural power.

Like the rest of the world, Ghanaians are no strangers to charismatic Christian religious leaders making outlandish claims with impunity. These leaders have, until now, enjoyed greater following, wealth, and political influence as a result of their claims. But they have also been looked upon with mistrust by a part of the public, who have long expressed their doubts through formal (mass media) and informal (private conversations) means. Today, this section of the public has become significantly larger, and a growing number of them are using social media to call these religious leaders out on their fakery. But who is making these accusations? And what forms of expression are they using?

African popular culture scholar Dr. Joseph Oduro-Frimpong, from Ashesi University Ghana, analyzed the claims made by three contemporary Ghanaian Christian religious leaders to answer these questions. His study is [published in the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*.](#)

Dr. Oduro-Frimpong found that the accusations on social media are largely being made through satirical visual representations, particularly memes and cartoons that channel existing public doubt and opinion. These then spark further critical discussion, creating a continuously fueled counternarrative against the claims. The accusations work as visual “social truths” against the supposed truths put forth by the religious leaders.



Dr. Oduro-Frimpong further believes that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this growing trend of levelling accusations on social media. He explains: *“Social media has now exposed many charismatic leaders who have, for a long time, been making such claims, but whose claims had been rarely put to the test before the pandemic. Their claims failed these tests. Now, for many, these leaders are no longer in a position of awe, and their words and actions are not considered sacrosanct anymore.”*

Yet, some of these leaders seem unfazed by the accusations against them and their spirit seems to be undampened, the study finds. How so? That is a topic for future research explorations.

But as the tide of public opinion turns on a large scale, these leaders could be losing influence among the upper ranks of society as well. *“One category of Ghanaians who publicly accused the religious leaders I studied as being fake are personalities with political, religious, and professional clout. These persons are interested in accountability and demand an end to practices rooted in selfishness and greed,”* says Dr. Oduro-Frimpong.

Perhaps, it is time for charismatic Christian religious leaders to realize that because of social media, this is an era in which their claims will always be shared widely and critiqued by a more discerning audience who will increasingly demand proof of the truth in these claims. Perhaps, it is time for these religious leaders to rethink their methods of ministry.

Reference

Authors	Joseph Oduro-Frimpong
Title of original paper	“The Fake is News”*: On Popular Visual Media, Fakery and Legitimacy Contestations in Charismatic Christianity in Contemporary Ghana
Journal	<i>Journal of African Cultural Studies</i>
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2021.1950524
Affiliations	Centre for African Popular Culture, Ashesi University, Accra, Ghana



Charismatic Christian 'fakery' continues to exist in Ghana but is losing ground against popular opinion expressed through visual art forms on social media.

Image courtesy: AdrianMedia on Pixabay

About Dr. Joseph Oduro-Frimpong

Dr. Joseph Oduro-Frimpong is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, and directs the Centre for African Popular Culture, Ashesi University, Ghana. Dr. Oduro-Frimpong's research interests include media anthropology, African popular (visual) culture, urban Ghana, and intercultural/interpersonal communication. He has published in such journals as *Semiotica*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Pragmatics*, *African Studies Review* and *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. He has curated exhibitions, and attended conferences, both nationally, and internationally. He received his PhD in cultural anthropology from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA, in 2012.